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## WHAT ARE YOU DOING ABOUT THE HOMELESS PROBLEM?

We often get questions from our residents and business owners asking what the City is doing about the homeless problem in our city. Just exactly what the homeless problem is likely depends on your perspective. Is it an increase in crime? An increase in illegal camping? Is it perhaps the uneasiness of having an increased number “different” people in our neighborhoods? Maybe all of the above?

In Murray, we have seen an increase in the number of homeless individuals since “Operation Rio Grande” was initiated about a year ago, mostly along the Jordan River, rail lines, and interstate freeways. Our police department gets numerous calls to investigate homeless individuals in or around neighborhoods, particularly when residents are concerned about their safety. Our fire department responds on average to two calls per day involving the transient population, and there have been a number of fires in or near transient camps and abandoned buildings in the past year. Business owners near the Jordan River and transportation corridors have expressed concerns over the impact on their businesses from homeless individuals. The homeless problem is indeed a complex, far-reaching, and extensive issue in our city, county, and society.

As a city, we have responded to these issues in a number of ways. Our police department has been patrolling our parks and trails on bicycles throughout the summer. They continue to monitor areas of concern regarding drug use and crime. They are also working in coordinated effort with UTA police and Utah Department of Public Safety officers. In addition to these measures, we have been involved with contacting and giving referrals to homeless individuals for assistance programs, including Workforce Services and the Health Department.



Our Public Works Department has assisted in cleanup of illegal encampment areas by providing personnel, trucks, and trailers and transporting materials to the landfill. Unfortunately, new encampments spring up rapidly after old ones are cleaned up.

Our Parks Department has seen an increase of homeless individuals sleeping in parks. Overnight camping is not permitted in parks, so police and code enforcement officers work to enforce that ordinance. The restrooms in all of our parks have automatic locking doors that lock at night. Wherever possible, trees and brush have been trimmed to eliminate hiding and camping areas. Park personnel have also worked to clean up homeless encampments.

As city leaders, we are in constant communication with County and State leaders regarding this difficult challenge. I am reminded that being homeless is not illegal, and some individuals choose that lifestyle. But homelessness goes hand-in-hand with an increase in drug use and petty crimes. We can never solve the problem by continually moving these people from one jurisdiction to another. The crisis is much bigger than one city or county, or even one state. As a city, I believe we are doing what we can within the bounds of the law and available resources. We are always open to thoughts and suggestions for solutions, and I welcome constructive and compassionate dialogue.